

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN McCAIN
CHAIRMAN, SENATE COMMITTEE ON
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
AVIATION SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING
ON THE IMPACT OF PILOT SHORTAGES ON
RURAL AIR SERVICE
JULY 25, 2000

- C For several years I have been concerned about pilot shortages in our armed forces, which can affect our combat readiness. Some of the same factors that influence military pilots are now having an impact on certain parts of the private sector. A strong economy has lead to record numbers of pilots being hired by the airline industry. Just as the generous pay scales and benefits of the major airlines have attracted pilots out of the military, smaller carriers are losing flight crews to the big players in the industry.
- C But the supply of qualified pilots has been negatively affected by the fact that there are now fewer ex-military pilots on the market. For decades, the industry has been able to take advantage of highly skilled and experienced pilots who came out of military service. Airline expansion has been traditionally supported by large numbers of ex-military pilots who became available after major conflicts. Over the next five years, however, the pilots who joined the airlines after the Vietnam War are set to retire in particularly large numbers because of the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) Age 60 Rule.
- C We must remain open minded about proposals to change the Age 60 Rule. They have the potential to ease the shortage of civilian pilots and reduce the pressure for military pilots to leave the service early. However, we are dealing with a rule that has been in effect for many years. Any modifications should not come at the expense of safety.
- C I recognize that many pilots and others strongly oppose this rule. There are clearly divided opinions among policy makers and within the aviation community. Because the FAA has decided that the Age 60 Rule is an appropriate standard, Congress must be cautious before taking any action that would substitute its views for those of the agency responsible for aviation safety. I am aware that there are legitimate views on both sides of this issue, but it is one that tends to fall within the authority of the FAA.

- C Balancing the needs of smaller and rural communities against safety considerations is difficult at best. Regional airlines and on-demand operators are an essential transportation link for many areas of the country. We must be aware that they sometimes have special needs.
- C I hope that this hearing and our witnesses will be able to generate workable ideas to help us ease the pilot shortage problem. I appreciate Senator Burns efforts on this subject, and I thank Chairman Gorton for holding this hearing. It is an issue that deserves the careful attention of all aviation policy makers.